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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000487

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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (03/19): "DIMINISHING CHANCES FOR PEACE"

Main Stories:

Al Quds leads with March 18 statements by Palestinian Authority Premier advisor Hatim Abdul Qader revealing that the Jerusalem municipality had in the preceding 48 hours issued 80 demolition orders for 90 Palestinian residential flats in Jerusalem. All papers run front page coverage of the news and add that the Municipality on March 18, demolished a Palestinian house in Azzariyah near Jerusalem. Papers highlight that the owner had obtained the required building permit from the local village council that considers the house to be in Area B, as defined by the Oslo Accords.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with news that Palestinian factions have agreed to an, "interim, transitional national consensus government with a limited term that ends after accomplishing presidential and legislative elections and the formation of a new government." The papers add that the factions did not agree on the political platform for the new government. All papers report that the fate of internal Palestinian reconciliation dialogue depends on the outcome of talks in Washington between Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulayman and the U.S. administration. Al Ayyam's front page reveals that Washington has told Sulayman that the U.S. will only recognize a Palestinian Authority government that accepts Quartet conditions and denounces violence. The papers further report that Sulayman met with Special Envoy Mitchell in Washington.

Al Ayyam's and Al Quds' front pages, also inside Al Hayat Al Jadida, feature a report on Israel's decision to "tighten" detention conditions for Hamas prisoners in Israeli prisons, in response to the failure of prisoner exchange talks with Hamas. The papers further report that Israel moved detained Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine leader Ahmad Sa'adat to Ashkelon prison, noting that the Israeli move is meant to diminish Sa'adat's

influence as a leader. In related news, Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Quds front page statements by Hamas leader Salah Bardawil stating on March 18 that Israel is to blame for the failure of prisoner exchange talks and urges Egypt to publicly assign blame to one of the parties.

Al Quds and Al Ayyam front page statements by Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Premier Fayyad following their separate meetings with Middle East Quartet Envoy Tony Blair in Ramallah on March 18. The Palestinian leaders reiterated their calls for a halt to Israeli settlement activities and incursions into the Palestinian Territories, stating that such action is key to rebuilding confidence in the peace process.

All papers do inside reporting on increased tension in Bethlehem caused by the alleged attempt by Palestinian Authority (PA) National Security forces to arrest a Palestinian judge, chasing him into the courthouse. The PA security forces denied targeting a judge and said that they were, "only tracking a citizen in an Israeli yellow-plated vehicle."

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida front page reports that Israeli Premier designate Netanyahu has invited the Kadima and Labor parties to coalition talks to form a new Israeli government. The paper further adds that Netanyahu continues, in parallel, to form a "rightwing" government.

An Al Quds' inside page reports on statements by USAID Director Howard Sumka, delivered on March 18 at the inauguration of a public park in Kufr Nima near Ramallah. Sumka is quoted stating that the park is the first of 20 parks to be established in the West Bank in support of the Palestinian people.-----

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BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Independent daily Al Quds' editorial is titled, "Diminishing chances for peace"(03/19): "The chances for [regional] peace are diminishing against an increase in violence and calls for confrontation... [coupled with]irresponsible, possible miscalculations by Israel regarding the Iranian issue... a heavy responsibility is placed on the shoulders of the international community and new U.S. administration to intensify a positive, effective role in moving things towards... calm."

2) Omar Al Abdul Majid Swaylim comments in independent daily Al Ayyam under the title, "Dialogue Committees: Initial harvest"(03/19): "While it seems that [Palestinian reconciliation talks] have reached an internal truce [between Fatah and Hamas]... it is more important [to] reach a solution to the root of the problem. Let's speed up, slowly, as the wise proverb says."

WALLES